

*Mitchell Says Ads are an Important Step Forward, but More Outreach is Needed*

**SCOTTSDALE** - U.S. Rep. Harry E. Mitchell today welcomed new print ads that are beginning to appear on Valley Metro buses across the Valley this week to promote public awareness of the veteran's suicide hotline. Mitchell, who chairs the House Committee on Veterans Affairs' Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, has been pressing the VA to address the epidemic of veteran suicide and increase its outreach to veterans at risk.

"I am pleased to have these ads here in Valley, but I would like to see the outreach increased and intensified," Mitchell said. "The VA can't just sit back and expect that veterans and their families will know where to turn for help. These ads are effective and helpful, but it will take a sustained and proactive effort to stop this epidemic of veteran suicides."

The Valley Metro bus ads are part of a nationwide VA campaign in which nearly 1,200 ads will be displayed on buses, bus shelters, rail and subway stations across the country through January 9, 2011. [Source: [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) ]

A photo of the new ads on Valley buses can be found [here](#) .

The increased outreach follows a hearing chaired by Mitchell in July, investigating why the VA had stopped previously successful outreach efforts to veterans at risk for suicide, chaired a hearing examining on the subject. [Source: [Mitchell Release](#) , July 14, 2010]

## Outreach Saves Lives

As of April 2010, the VA has reported nearly 7,000 rescues of actively suicidal veterans, which were attributed to seeing the print ads, public service announcements (PSAs), or promotional products. Additionally, referrals to VA mental health services increased. In Phoenix, the VA reported a 234 percent increase in calls to the suicide hotline within 30 days of the launch of its public awareness campaign. However, late last year, the VA told Mitchell that, despite the

success, its PSAs had stopped airing. [Source: [Congressional Inquiry](#) , March 2010]

The suicide hotline is often the front line of the government's expanding efforts to deter suicide among veterans. [ [New York Times](#) , July 30, 2010] According to the VA, since its inception in 2007 it has saved more than 10,000 Veterans and provided counseling for more than 180,000 Veterans and their loved ones at home and overseas. The hotline is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week by trained mental health professionals prepared to deal with immediate crises.

## A Suicide Epidemic

In September, the Marine Corps reported that 52 Marines killed themselves last year, compared with 42 in 2008, leaving the Marine Corps with the highest rate of suicide of any U.S. military service. The Marine Corps announced they will start using a new buddy system to help prevent veteran suicides. [Source: [Los Angeles Times](#) , September 10, 2010]

In July, the Army released a 15-month-long study that reported that in Fiscal Year 2009, 239 soldiers committed suicide in both the active duty and reserve force. Additionally, 146 soldiers died due to "high risk" behavior, including 74 drug overdoses. During the same time frame there were 1,713 suicide attempts. [Source: [CNN](#) , July 29, 2010]

In June, the Army experienced a record high number of suicides. USA Today reported that "the suicide rate among 18-to-29-year old men who've left the military has gone up significantly."

Specifically, according to The New York Times, veterans account for about one in five of the more than 30,000 suicides committed in the United States each year. [Source: [USA Today](#) , Jan. 11, 2010; [New York Times](#) , July 30, 2010]

## Mitchell Has Long Pressed for More Outreach

Mitchell has repeatedly called upon the VA to increase outreach to veterans who need mental

health services and are at risk of suicide. Out of an estimated veteran population of 23 million veterans, only about 8 million veterans are enrolled for care through the VA [Source: [Department of Veterans Affairs](#), April 28, 2010]

Mitchell has continually called on the VA to explain why they stopped airing a successful public service announcement (PSA) starring Forrest Gump star Gary Sinise that let veterans at risk for suicide know about the VA's suicide prevention hotline, and chaired a hearing examining the issue in July. [Source: [Mitchell Release](#), July 14, 2010]

Since 2007, Congressman Mitchell and the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations which he chairs, has been examining the epidemic of suicide rates among Veterans, and the VA's efforts to reach out to veterans at risk. [Sources: [Mitchell Release](#), November 19, 2007; For additional information about the epidemic of veteran suicides: [CBS News](#), November 13, 2007]

Until 2008, the VA had a self-imposed ban on TV advertising as a means to conduct outreach to veterans - including outreach to those at risk for suicide. Mitchell began calling upon the VA to reverse its long-standing self-imposed ban on television advertising and increase outreach to veterans who need mental health services and are at risk of suicide. In 2008, the VA reversed the ban, and launched a pilot public awareness campaign in Washington, DC to inform veterans and their families about where they can turn for help - which was ultimately expanded nationally. [Source: [CBS News](#), July 14, 2008; [Mitchell Release](#), June 18, 2008]

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